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No. 94. The last sketch of the Clonmacnoise tombstones is that of one which bears evident marks of being of much more recent date than any of the foregoing. The form of the stone is somewhat coffin-shaped, and the ornamentation at its foot has quite a twelfth century look. The inscription is as follows:—Rón . Hu topón.

Nos. 95-7. On the completion of the sketches of the Clonmacnoise tombstones I was struck by the fact that the letters presented many varieties of form; and in the following three illustrations I have given each variety; thus we see that the

Letter	Forms.	Letter	Forms.
a . . . . .	has . . . . . 15	l . . . . .	has . . . . . 8
b . . . . .	— . . . . . 6	m . . . . .	— . . . . . 2
c . . . . .	— . . . . . 5	n . . . . .	— . . . . . 5
d . . . . .	— . . . . . 7	o . . . . .	— . . . . . 5
e . . . . .	— . . . . . 9	p . . . . .	— . . . . . 1
f . . . . .	— . . . . . 3	q . . . . .	— . . . . . 1
g . . . . .	— . . . . . 5	r . . . . .	— . . . . . 16
h . . . . .	— . . . . . 9	s . . . . .	— . . . . . 2
i . . . . .	— . . . . . 2	t . . . . .	— . . . . . 6

It is not improbable that by the form of these letters the dates of many of the tombstones might be roughly estimated, at least by centuries, as we know that the Irish form of letter varied from century to century, from the ancient Roman or Uncial character to the more angular and current form of the modern scribe.

I conclude this collection of ancient Irish inscribed tombstones by sketches of two from Arranmore, in the Bay of Galway:—

No. 98. The inscription on this slab consists of the following letters: Op. up McInach, and I found it lying near some ruins at the village of Onucht.

No. 99. The tomb slab of St. Breca, from the old church dedicated to the Holy Ghost. According to Dr. Petrie, this saint died in the sixth century.

Mr. SAMUEL FERGUSON, Q. C., read the following paper:—

ACCOUNT OF OGHAM INSCRIPTIONS IN THE CAVE AT RATHCROGHAN,  
COUNTY OF ROSCOMMON.

THE principal remains at Rathcroghan, formerly the residence of the provincial Kings of Connaught, are indicated on sheets 21 and 22 of the Ordnance Survey Map of the county of Roscommon, and have been described in some detail by O'Donovan in a note to his translation of the "Annals of the Four Masters," at A. D. 1223, and more fully in letters preserved among the MS. materials for the intended "Ordnance Survey Memoir," and now deposited in the Library of the Academy (14 F. 8, p. 191, *et seq.*).

Among these remains may be noticed on the map—310 yards northwest of the ancient sepulchral enclosure called Relig-na-Ree, or the Graveyard of the Kings—a spot marked with the name *Owneygat*, that is, the

Cat's Cave, of which the following account is given in the MS. letters above referred to :—

“There are two remarkable caves in the townland of Glenballythomas, of which the more remarkable is called Uí-mhao ná gcat, because wild cats used to hunt rabbits in it. I walked into this a considerable distance, and saw its fine roof and hanging spars, like icicles, but will leave the description of it to geologists. The country people say that a woman followed a calf into this cave, and that she could not stop him till he came out at Keish Corran. I went as far into it as any one could, that is, until it terminated in a cleft, not wide enough to admit my head. This, according to tradition, was the Bank of Ireland in the time of Queen Mab; but if it was, the drops from the Gothic roof of the edifice must have injured the bank notes very much. A truer tradition connected with it is, that one Croghan, a rebel, lived in it after the rebellion, and by so doing saved his neck from the halter.”

On examining this cave, on the 30th of September, 1864, the writer observed inscriptions in the Ogham character, on two of the roofing stones of its upper chambers or galleries. Part of the inscription on each stone was built into the structure, so that the stones before being placed must have been already sculptured. Whatever the age of the cave, the inscriptions must, therefore, have at least an equal antiquity.

The cave has always, within literary memory, been regarded as of the epoch of Meave, the celebrated Queen of Connaught, who lived about the beginning of the Christian era. The *Tain Bo Cuailgne*, or Cattle-Spoil of Quelgny, commemorates an expedition led by this heroine of antiquity into Ulster during the reign of Conor Mac Nessa, whose death is made, in Irish traditional history, to synchronize with that of our Lord. She was daughter of Eochaid Fidleach, by whom the principal fort, or royal dwelling at Rathcroghan, is said to have been erected. Her name, which popular tradition has impressed on a great number of places in Ireland, is in its simplest form spelled MEDBH, equivalent to MEDF. Some one intimately connected with her family was called FRAECH. Such is the name given to her son-in-law in the ancient historical tract called the “*Tain-bo-Flidisi*,” one of the introductory stories which constitute the preface to the *Tain-bo-Cuailgne*. She had many sons, by different fathers, and has left a vivid recollection of her name throughout the west of Ireland. That she lived at Rathcroghan at a period before the introduction of Christianity into Ireland is a fact which no one, in the present state of historical knowledge, will be disposed to deny.

The earliest notices of the cave appear to treat it as a treasury house of Meave and her husband Ailill. It is so represented in the *Tain-bo-Aingin*, another of the introductory or pre-tales of the *Tain-bo* of Quelgny. Such also was the tradition of the country in 1838, when O'Donovan made his communications to the Ordnance Office. The same idea still exists among the peasantry of the country, by whom the interior of the cave has been repeatedly explored within the last twenty years, in the hope of finding treasure. Their operations have resulted in

the falling in of the earth, which now chokes up the western end of the cave, and renders it impossible to say how far it extends.

The writer is indebted to W. M. Hennessy, Esq., for the following further notes in reference to this cave:—

“ In the list of celebrated places preserved in a stave of the ‘ Book of Leinster,’ which is really a portion of the ‘ Book of Lecan,’ the cave of Cruachan is described as one of the three caves of Ireland,—the other two being the cave of Howth, and the Derg Farna, now known as the cave of Dunmore, near Kilkenny. This tract, from its language, appears to be of very high antiquity.

“ In the historical tale called the *Tain-bo-Ainghin*, or the Cattle Spoil of Ainghin, preserved in the ‘ Yellow Book of Lecan,’ the cave of Cruachan is referred to as the residence of a fairy community; and some interesting particulars regarding the proceedings of its denizens are related by a person who, for some slight to a fountain fairy, was condemned to a year’s residence therein.”

It consists of a natural fissure in the limestone rock, which appears to have been artificially widened, so as to give an average breadth of five feet throughout a distance of about forty yards. This cavern, the floor of which is from fifteen to twenty-five feet under the surface, is connected with the upper chambers, in which the inscriptions exist, by a passage excavated in the rock, and roofed over, as are the external chambers, by long stones, artificially placed, and bonded into the dry stone walls forming the sides of the passages or chambers near the surface. Whether these upper passages be entrances to the cave, or chambers to which the cave itself served as an entrance, may be a matter of doubt. They are two in number—one forming a prolongation, at a higher level, of the natural cavern, the other opening upon it at right angles. Around these openings exist the remains of a tumulus of about twenty yards in diameter. The subjoined woodcut exhibits the general appearance and disposition of the parts, the dotted lines representing the underground constructions.

Fig. 1.

The traces of several interments remain about the margin of the tumulus; and one nearly perfect sepulchral cist exists within a few

feet to the west of the lateral chamber, which now forms the principal approach. This chamber may be portion of a covered avenue, or it may be portion of a separate apartment. It is entered from a depression on the surface opening to the south, which bears the appearance rather of a breach made into the end of a chamber than of a passage. About seven feet in length of the covered part remains. The width is three feet eight inches; the height, from the clay which has fallen in, and forms the floor, not more than three feet three inches. At the junction of this crypt with the eastern opening, a species of transept is formed, about eight feet by four, and four feet high, extending eastward into the remains of what has now the appearance of a passage, and opening on the western side into the narrow gallery formed in the rock, which descends by a series of inclines and rude steps into the principal apartment below. In this lower interior the natural walls of rock rise to a height of about eighteen feet, converging at top, and having much the appearance of the inclined passages in the Mexican pyramids. The spaces between the rock ledges at top are, as are the upper passages and chambers, covered in with transverse blocks of stone. These stones, where they form the lintels at the junction of the upper chambers, have been selected with care; and it is on the lintel stone of the southern crypt, marked A on the plan, where it abuts on what has been described as the transept, that the principal inscription exists.

This stone, which is of the limestone of the neighbourhood, measures four feet eight inches in length, of which one foot is engaged in the adjoining masonry. It has an average breadth of one foot four inches, being somewhat broader towards the western end, and varies in thickness from four to nine inches. Its under surface is corrugated in the direction of its length with numerous natural striae; and it does not appear to have undergone any preparation with the tool, except at one point, on the inner edge, at the eastern end, where it presents the appearance of having been rubbed down, so as to form two ribbed projections, separated by shallow grooved indentations, resembling the

Fig. 2.

analogous work on one of the stones of New Grange, which has been figured in Wilde's "Beauties of the Boyne and Blackwater" (p. 194).

Fig. 8.

Something of the same kind is also observable on one of the Ogham inscribed stones in the Academy's Lapidarian Museum, No. 5. These indentations, whatever object they may have had, appear to indicate that this is the upper end of the stone, and raise a probable conjecture that it originally stood upright. They are not carried across the face of the stone, nor do they appear on the opposite edge. Seven, or possibly eight, Ogham characters exist on the external edge and face, and ten on the internal edge and face of this lintel. The external appearance of the stone, with its inscription, is shown on the annexed woodcut, Fig. 4. There is, at the right hand, detached from the inscription, an indentation on the edge-line of the stone, too faint to be relied on with any certainty; but which may possibly be a single notch, standing for the vowel a. A circular disc or dot appears above this indentation on the edge near the end. This also is uncertain, and is not shown on the drawing. Two vertical strokes, connected with some curved indentations, apparently artificial, also exist on one of the stones forming the jamb or *quoyn* of the passage on the right. They are too uncertain to be practically relied on, and are only hinted at in the woodcut. The character of these indentations has a general resemblance to that of some of the rubbed lines appearing on the stones of the chambers at New Grange and Dowth.

When first observed, the lintel was partly concealed by a block of stone, constituting portion of the eastern side wall, and covering part of the final character at that end. The removal of this block enabled the writer to examine the whole under surface and edge, and to state that no further inscribed marks exist upon it.

Fig. 4.

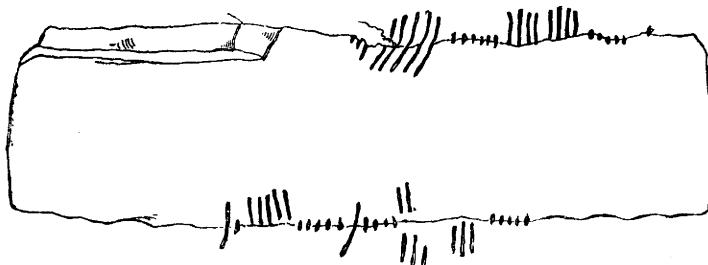
The internal appearance of this lintel is shown below.

Fig. 5.

The extended inscription is also given, so as to exclude the errors incident to perspective.

Fig. 6.

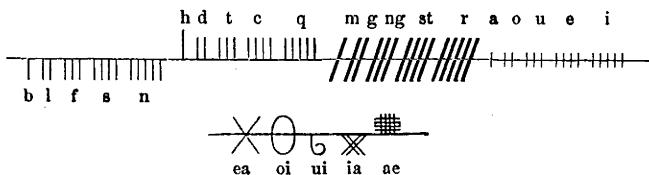
Outer Edge.



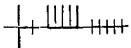
Inner Edge.

Before proceeding further in the consideration of these characters, it may be interesting to those members of the Academy who have not given special attention to the subject, that something should be said of the nature of the Ogham writing, and of the existing means for its deciphering. It was a species of cipher, in which straight strokes engraved on monumental stones, by their number and relation to a particular line, called the stem-line (generally formed by the edge of the stone), represented the letters of an alphabet. Facility of engraving with rude implements, rather than a desire for secrecy—for who would desire to commemorate in signs not generally understood?—may have been the original motive for the use of this species of writing. The value of the characters depending on the number of strokes, and these numbers increasing in a progressive ratio in sets of five—that is, five groups below, five above, five obliquely across, and five directly across, or on the stem-line—it is obvious, that if purposes of secrecy or curiosity were desired, the cipher might be made more or less abstruse by varying the number of the strokes; as by beginning with two or more at the commencement of each series; and a great number of examples of such cryptic Oghams may be seen in the tract on this subject in the "Book of Ballymote." They are all, however, resolvable into the original key-cipher, in which each set of five commences with a single stroke; and which, with the other more complex examples, and certain arbitrary marks for vowel combinations, is also found in the same depository. With this key, available for the last five hundred years, we may be surprised to find the Ogham character still involved in so much mystery. This may be, in some measure, accounted for by the discredit brought on the subject by a paper in our own "Transactions," at an early period in the history of the Academy, in which a supposed passage from one of the Ossianic poems was adduced in elucidation of an Ogham inscription existing on Callan Mountain, in the county of Clare

("Transactions R. I. A.," vol. i., *Antiq.*, p. 3). The passage appears to have found its way into the text from a modern source; and the charge of falsification extended itself, with questionable justice, as it seems to the writer, to the inscription itself. Added to this disaster at the outset of the inquiry, were the really great obstacles arising from the singularity of the names, and from the absence of any clue to the sequences in which the writing ran, whether from top to bottom, from left to right, or *vice versa*. It was not till our President undertook the investigation in the character on the scientific principles applicable to cipher-writing in general, that the subject again attracted a philosophic interest. His results, arising on independent analysis and comparison, are understood—for as yet the complete paper has not been published—to have come out in substantial accordance with the old key; and in a short paper in our "Proceedings" (vol. iv., p. 358), he adopted and published the "Ballymote Key," which, with some slight difference, had also been given by Dr. O'Donovan in his "Irish Grammar," and by other earlier writers.



In the course of these investigations our President early identified the group,



reading *Maqui*, as the genitive form of *Mac*, a son—a conclusion which was destined to receive corroboration of the most convincing kind from a source not then known to be in existence. The writer here refers to those monumental stones of Wales, which bear inscriptions in Roman characters with accompanying Oghams. These Oghams, rendered according to the key so furnished, have been found to yield results confirmatory not only of the alphabetic force of the characters, but of their proper sequences and collocations, as indicated by the independent method of investigation employed by our President. The Welsh Oghams so tested have, in fact, been found to resolve themselves into an echo of the correlative Roman writing. One of these inscribed Welsh pillars, which may be justly called the Rosetta Stone of the investigation, is in effect both bilingual and bi-literal. It commemorates in Latin words and Roman characters a person called *Sagran*, son of *Cunotam*, in the form (Lapis) *Sagranii Fili Cunotami*. An Ogham on the edge of the same stone reads *Sagramni Maqi Cunotami*. Here we have *Maqui* as the equivalent of the Latin *Fili*; and must acknowledge the conclusion to be very cogent that

in Irish monuments of a cognate kind, wherever we find the combination of Ogham characters which sounds “*Magi*,” we may expect, before it, the name of the person commemorated, and, after it, the patronymic of that person. Such, in fact, is the formula of commemoration found on great numbers of the Irish Ogham monuments. The writer instances in our own lapidarian Museum, No. 7, *Qunilogni Magi D \* \* \**; *Nocati Magi, Magi Rett \* \**, No. 11; and in Mr. Du Noyer’s collection *Logogi Magi Erenan* (Du Noyer MSS. Lib. R. I. A., vol. i., No. 43). *Erc Magi Magerti*, *ibid.*, No. 27; *Lafi cas Magi Muce*, *ibid.*, No. 27; and numerous similar examples in the publications of the other Irish Archaeological Societies.

The presence of this well-known combination of strokes and notches, reading **MAQR**, at the western end of the legend on the inner edge of the Rathcroghan stone, taken in connexion with the other indications of that being the lower end of the stone, and with the generally observed rule that these inscriptions read from bottom to top, and from left to right, leaves no reasonable doubt that the remainder of that line contains the patronymic, and the line on the opposite side the name, of the person commemorated. Reverting to the opposite side, and reading it from bottom to top, and from left to right, and according to the ordinary key, it presents a combination of characters, of which – **R** – **CCI** are free from doubt, and of which it is not impossible that the three strokes occupying the place of the first blank represent **R**, and the notches occupying the place of the second blank stand for **AR**; in which case this part of the legend would read **FRAICCI**. The difficulty in respect to the first set of characters arises from a fracture of the stone, which leaves it in doubt whether the third stroke crossed the line of the edge. In that case, the reading would be **OMR** – **CCI**. The six notches represented by the second blank may either be a double **U**, or may read **EO**, or **OE**, or in any of the combinations of **AUO**. The name, whatever it be, seems to be in the genitive form, and to imply some such expression as “the stone of” before it.

Leaving this portion of the inscription, and coming to the patronymic, it is certainly startling to find it read, as it does in this collocation and sequence, without doubt or difficulty,

**MEDFFI**,

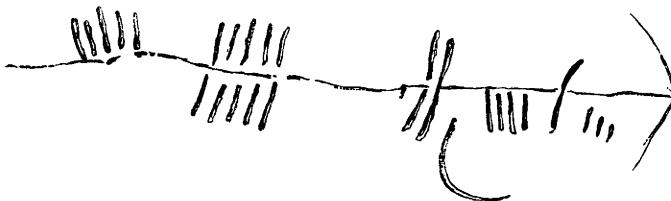
—that is, collating the several parts of the legend,

“(The stone of) [FRAIC?] son of Medf.”

The second inscription is found on one of the lintels covering the eastern passage, marked B on Fig. 1. When first observed, four of the characters and part of the fifth were hidden under the face of the stone, where it lay bedded on the southern jamb of the passage; and it was not until it was raised, and turned on its side, that they were, for the first time since the construction of the cave, offered to human observation. The appearance of the sculpture seems to indicate long exposure to the weather prior to the deposit of the stone; and goes to support the conjecture suggested by the ribbed appearance in the other, that

both these lintels may have been monumental pillar-stones, brought not improbably from the adjoining cemetery of Relig-na-Ree. The inscription consists of eight characters, two of which stand somewhat detached, yet seem to require collocation with the others to render an articulate sound.

Fig. 7.



The Key-word **MAQI** does not exist here to assist us; but a curved character occurring near the end of the group indicates that it is to be deemed under the stem-line, and that consequently the detached characters above referred to are those from which the reading commences. The writer is not aware of any other example of the curved character in any existing monument; but it is one of the contractions given in the recognised Ogham keys, having the value of the vowels *ui*. The last character to the right is extremely faint, and the writer is unable to say with certainty whether it consists of three or of two indentations. It appeared, however, to the eye and touch rather to consist of three strokes and these below the stem-line; but as *r* would not articulate with the next adjoining character (*m*), and the strokes are short and notch-like, he inclines to suppose it the vowel *u*, a not unfrequent termination of proper names in Oghamic writing. Taken in this sequence, the legend on this second stone would read

**QRAGUISMU.**

The writer is not aware at present of any corresponding proper name. Names beginning with the same combination are, however, found on some of the inscribed stones in the Academy's collection, as

**QRITTALEGI QRITUMAH,**

on stone, No. 5. In the absence of anything more satisfactory we can, therefore, conclude no more from this object, than that Ogham writing was certainly in use prior to the construction of the Cave of Curachain.

But, as regards the lintel first described, the legend of "The Son of Medf" appears to stand plainly legible, according to the ordinary key, and in the ordinary course of collocation; and, taken in connexion with the place and its traditions, may afford a confirmation of the testimony of our old books to the use of alphabetic writing in the Ogham character at a period before the introduction of Christianity.

On the seemingly Latinized form of the inflections, and the feminine genitive in *i*, the writer desires to submit the matter to more competent philologists; and, with regard to the probable age of the cave, and the appearance it presents of having had two entrances, refers to Keating's tract on "Early Irish Modes of Sepulture," from the *Tri Biorr-ghaethe an Bhais* ("Irish Ossianic Society's Transactions," vol. i., p. 63, *et seq.*), and in particular to the old poem there cited :\*—

Feapt aen doiruip d'fion go naoi,  
Feapt go n-dó òdirrib do mndoi.

A grave of one door for a man of science ;  
A grave of two doors for a woman.

Mr. Eugene A. Conwell read a paper (in continuation) "On the Ancient Remains at Sliabh-na-Callighe."

Mr. H. F. Hore, by permission of the Academy, read a paper "On Banshees."

The Academy adopted an Address to His Excellency the Lord Lieutenant, brought up from the Council by the Secretary.

STATED MEETING.—WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 1864.

The VERY REV. CHARLES GRAVES, D. D., President, in the Chair.

The Secretary reported that the Address of the Academy to His Excellency the Lord Lieutenant, adopted on the 24th of November, was presented by the President and Members, at the Viceregal Lodge, on Thursday last, the 24th inst.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED,—That the Address to the Lord Lieutenant, together with His Excellency's Answer, be printed in the Proceedings.

*Address to His Excellency the Lord Baron Wodehouse, Lord Lieutenant General, and General Governor of Ireland.*

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY,—We, the President and Members of the Royal Irish Academy, respectfully desire to present to Your Excellency our hearty congratulations upon your arrival in Ireland as the representative of our most gracious Sovereign.

In virtue of your high office, Your Excellency becomes, under our Charter, the Visitor of the Academy. We are thus privileged, as a body incorporated for the promotion of the study of Science, Polite

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\* Since making the above communication, the writer has been informed by Richard R. Brash, Esq., Sunday's Well, Cork, that Mr. Brash, accompanied by J. Windle, Esq., Cork, observed the Ogham inscription on the stone marked A, on a visit to Rathcroghan in the year 1852.